

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 SCCT-01 A-01 OPR-01 SY-04 OCE-00 CCO-00

EB-07 COME-00 AGR-05 PC-01 IO-10 NIC-01 /089 W

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R 231250Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7072

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 10F2 SAN SALVADOR 5001

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS ES

SUBJ: MASS MARCH BY CAMPESINOS TO PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

REF: (A) A-153 NOV 6, (B) SAN SALVADOR 4977

SUMMARY: SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL HAPPENING OCCURRED ON DECEMBER 18 WHEN WELL OVER 10,000 CAMPESINOS MARCHED THROUGH SAN SALVADOR TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AND PRESENTED A PETITION TO PRESIDENT ARTURO ARMANDO MOLINA. MOLINA PERSONALLY APPEARED AND, IN EXCHANGE OF SPEECHES, PROMISED ONCE AGAIN HIS COMMITMENT TO AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION AND JUSTICE. BOTH SIDES, RECOGNIZING NEED FOR EACH OTHERS'S POLITICAL SUPPORT, IF NOT CONFIDENCE, DID EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO AVOID EITHER CONFRONTATION OR THREAT. MARCH, ORGANIZED COMPLETELY BY UNION COMUNAL SALVADORENA (UCS), WAS REMARKABLE TESTIMONY TO: PRESENT ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP; AND EXTRAORDINARY INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE OF CAMPESINO PARTICIPANTS WHO WANT TO MAKE THEIR DEMANDS KNOWN. UCS LEADERS ARE FAR FROM SANGUINE THAT MEETING WILL PRODUCE MUCH BEYOND

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RECOGNITION OF GROUPS PREVIOUSLY UNRECOGNIZED, STRENGTH. ELATED

POST-MARCH MOOD OF UCS LEADERSHIP WAS GENERALLY "YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING YET".

1. THE UNION COMUNAL SALVADORENA (UCS), THE APOLITICAL, WELL ORGANIZED AND GROWING CAMPESENO ORGANIZATION WHICH CLAIMS TO SPEAK FOR 150,000 RURAL PEASANT FARMERS, STAGED A MASSIVE MARCH TO THE CASA PRESIDENCIAL THROUGH DOWNTOWN SAN SALVADOR DURING MORNING DECEMBER 18. THE MARCH'S PURPOSE WAS TO PRESENT A PETITION DIRECTLY TO PRESIDENT MOLINA IN WHICH UCS DESCRIBED ITS: (A) DISSATISFACTION WITH ACTUAL AGRARIAN LAW (ON BOOKS SINCE 1907); AND (B) SOLIDARITY WITH AND READINESS TO SUPPORT AND ADVISE, PRESIDENT IN IMPLEMENTING HIS PROMISE TO CARRY OUT MEANINGFUL AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM. SECONDARY PURPOSE WAS TO DEMONSTRATE THE DISCIPLINE AND NON-CONFRONTATIONAL ATTITUDE OF THE UCS.

2. THE DEMONSTRATION HAD ITS GENESIS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO IN A MEETING UCS LEADERSHIP HAD WITH PRESIDENT MOLINA (REF A). MOLINA WAS REPORTEDLY IMPRESSED WITH SERIOUSNESS AND ABILITIES OF THOSE HE MET. SINCE HE WAS ALSO SEEKING TO BOLSTER HIS POPULAR IMAGE AND GAIN MASS SUPPORT FOR HIS RELATIVELY UNDEFINED AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION PROPOSALS, MOLINA INFORMED UCS OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO APPEAR AND SPEAK TO A MASS RALLY SPONSORED BY UCS. UCS BEGAN NECESSARY PLANNING, BUT SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WAS INFORMED THAT PRESIDENT WAS NO LONGER ABLE TO APPEAR. GOES SUGGESTED, BUT DID NOT COMMAND, THAT RALLY ITSELF BE CALLED OFF. UCS DECIDED TO GO AHEAD ON ITS OWN.

3. WORKING EXCLUSIVELY FROM ITS OWN RESOURCES THE UCS ORGANIZED AND CARRIED OUT WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS AN IMPRESSIVE TESTIMONY TO ITS ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND STRONG ALLEGIANCE OF ITS MEMBERSHIP. THE PARADE, WITNESSED BY TWO POLICEMEN FROM START TO FINISH, WAS COMPOSED OF 10-12,000 POOR RURAL FARM WORKERS FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE COUNTRY. MOST HAD ARRIVED BY OWN DEVICES, MANY IN GROUPS WHICH HAD WALKED ALL NIGHT TOWARDS CAPITAL FROM AS FAR AS SONSONATE, OR IN HIRED TRUCKS AND BUSES. 20-25 PERCENT WERE WOMEN, 10-15 PERCENT WERE BAREFOOT.

4. MOST IMPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF ASSEMBLY WERE INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND OBVIOUS PEACEFUL BUT DETERMINED INTENT OF PARTICIPANTS. MASS
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OF PERSONS APPROXIMATELY 6 BLOCKS IN LENGTH, EACH ROW 3-10 MARCHERS ACROSS, WAS MANAGED BY NO MORE THAN TEN "MARSHALLS", CONSIDERING ROUTE OF MARCH WAS APPROXIMATELY 2 MILES LONG AND THROUGH CONGESTED CHRISTMAS TRAFFIC, FACT THAT THIS MASS OF PEOPLE MOVED SO PEACEFULLY AND ORDERLY AND ARRIVED AT DESTINATION WAS TESTAMENT TO UCS'S EFFECTIVENESS IN ORGANIZATION.

5. ON ARRIVAL AT CASA PRESIDENCIAL, PRESIDENT MOLINA AND MOST MEMBERS

OF THE CABINET APPEARED ON BALCONY. UCS SECRETARY GENERAL VIERA AND SEVERAL OTHER DIRECTORY MEMBERS WENT UP AND STOOD WITH PRESIDENT. SECGEN MADE A SHORT AND DIGNIFIED SPEECH TO PRESIDENT REMINDING HIM OF HIS PROMISES TO TRANSFORM AGRARIAN SECTOR. MOLINA RESPONDED IN KIND. HE REMINDED THE CROWD OF HIS PAST PROMISES, HIS CONSTANT TRIPS TO THE CAMPO. CLAIMING THAT AS MILITARY MAN HE COULD NOT BE POLITICAL DEMAGOGUE, HE CALLED ON THE CROWD TO BE WITNESSES TO HIS RENEWED PROMISE TO WORK AND FIGHT IN BEHALF OF ALL SALVADOREANS, INCLUDING HIS BROTHER CAMPESINOS. BOTH SPEECHES WERE FREQUENTLY INTERRUPTED BY APPLAUSE. CROWD DISPERSED BY MARCHING PAST PRESIDENT WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS BIDDING HIM ADIOS.

6. UCS LEADERS PRESENT CALIMED DEMONSTRATION WAS "LARGEST ORGANIZED RALLY EVER IN COUNTRY". LAST COMPARABLE GATHERING WAS SAID TO BE SAN SALVADOR'S 7000 TEACHERS ON STRIKE SOME FOUR YEARS AGO. UCS ALSO CLAIMED THAT MANY OF THEIR GROUPS WERE APPLAUDED AND GIVEN FOOD AS THEY PASSED THROUGH RURAL COMMUNITIES ON THEIR WAY TO SAN SALVADOR. PAPERS REPORT THAT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME MOLINA HAS APPEARED ON BALCONY TO TALK TO DEMONSTRATORS.

7. ANOTHER IMPRESSIVE ASPECT OF ENTIRE EPISODE WAS LACK OF VISIBLE CROWD CONTROLS BY GOES. NO TROOPS OR EVEN TRAFFIC POLICE APPEARED. ENTRANCE TO CASA PRESIDENCIAL REMAINED OPEN AND UNGUARDED THROUGH OUT, WITH DEMONSTRATORS RECIPROCATING BY LEAVING RESPECTFUL DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND PALACE ENTRANCE. ON CAMPESINO SIDE, ALL PARTICIPANTS WERE AS SIMPLY DRESSED AS POSSIBLE. NONE HAD MACHETES OR OTHER TOOLS WHICH OFTEN ARE TAKEN FOR GRANTED AS PART OF SALVADORAN CAMPO DRESS. THIS WAS DELIBERATE GESTURE OF UCS LEADERSHIP TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF THREAT OR CONFRONTATION. ENTIRE ATMOSPHERE UCS WISHED TO CREATE WAS ONE OF PEACEFUL PETITION TO THEIR PRESIDENT, AGAINST WHOM THEY HARBOR NO GRIEVANCES, AND WITH WHOM THEY WANT TO CONSULT ON

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THOSE MATTERS OF MUTUAL IMPORTANCE. AMONG SCORES OF PLACARDS THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE WAS "EL CAMPESINO UNIDO DEBE SER OIDO" ("A UNITED PEASANTRY SHOULD BE LISTENED TO").

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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USIA-06 AID-05 SCCT-01 A-01 OPR-01 SY-04 OCE-00 CCO-00

EB-07 COME-00 AGR-05 PC-01 IO-10 NIC-01 /089 W

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R 231250Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7073

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8. THE FOLLOWING DAY THE UCS LEADERSHIP WAS STILL ELATED WITH THE EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS OF THEIR ORGANIZATION EFFORTS. IN A DINNER WITH POLOFFS, NEITHER SECGEN VIERA NOR ANY OTHER MEMBER OF THE DIRECTIVA WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT THE PRESIDENT COULD DELIVER MUCH IN THE WAY OF REFORM THAT WOULD MEET EVEN THEIR MINIMUM DEMANDS. WHILE EXPRESSING BELIEF THAT MOLINA HAS SINCERE DESIRE TO HELP RURAL POOR, UCS, LEADERS DO NOT FORESEE HIS BEING ABLE TO WITHSTAND PRESSURES THAT THEY FEAR WILL IN END FORCE HIM TO MAINTAIN STATUS QUO. THEY SEE MAJOR PLUSES OF DEMONSTRATION AS PROOF: 1) THAT THEY CAN GET THEIR PEOPLE OUT IN MASSIVE NUMBERS; 2) THE THE PRESIDENT AND THOSE AROUND HIM MUST NOW RECOGNIZE THAT ABILITY. THEY SAID IF ANYONE WAS IMPRESSED OR SURPRISED WITH THE MAGNITUDE OF THE MARCH, "WAIT TILL THEY SEE NEXT YEAR'S WHEN WE MARCH DURING THE NON-HARVEST PERIOD".

9. COMMENT:. SUCH A GATHERING, ESPECIALLY DURING HEIGHT OF HARVEST SEASON WHEN MOST OF THE PARTICIPANTS HAD TO LOSE AT LEAST TWO DAYS WAGES TO MARCH, MUST BE SEEN AS IMPORTANT POLITICAL HAPPENING. BOTH SIDES, UCS AND GOES, OBVIOUSLY WANTED TO, AND CONFIDENTIAL

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DID, AVOID ANY SEMBLANCE OF CONFRONTATION OR ANTAGONISM. SIGNIFICANTLY, UCS DID NOT REFER IN ANY WAY TO RECENT EVENTS IN LA CAYETANA (REF B). LEADERS EXPLAINED THIS WAS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WANT: 1) ANYTHING TO SPOIL MAIN OBJECTIVE OF PARADE; 2) TO PERSONALLY EMBARRASS OR PROVOKE PRESIDENT; OR 3) TO GO OUT ON LIMB WHEN THEY "DO NOT REALLY KNOW WHAT HAPPENED AT

LA CAYETANA". REFERRING TO THE LA CAYETANA CLASH HOWEVER AS A "VERY GRAVE INCIDENT", THEY SAID ITS ONLY POSITIVE ASPECT WAS THAT IT WILL CONVINCE TENS OF THOUSANDS MORE CAMPESINOS TO JOIN THE UCS. FACT THAT MOLINA APPEARED AND SPOKE, ESPECIALLY AFTER REQUESTING THAT UCS NOT HOLD MEETING, AND MANNER IN WHICH CAMPESINOS RECEIVED PRESIDENT'S APPEARANCE AND WORDS, INDICATES THAT BOTH SIDES WANT TO MAINTAIN EARLIER IMAGE OF WORKING TOGETHER ON AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION. THIS NOT TO SAY THAT EITHER NECESSARILY TRUSTS OTHE SIDE, BUT MEETING UNDERSCORED PRAGMATIC NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP. BOTH SIDES REALIZE THAT THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TRY TO WORK TOGETHER.

10. UCS FEAR THAT "LEFT WING" ELEMENTS, WISHING TO EMBARRASS OR INCITE PRESIDENT, MIGHT TRY TO INFILTRATE PARADE AND CAUSE INCIDENTS, PROVED UNFOUNDED. POLOFFS SAW NO SUCH SIGNS. IF ANY NON-UCS'ERS DID TRY TO INTERFERE, THEY DID SO WITHOUT MAKING THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN.

11. PARADE AND EXCHANGE OF WORDS WITH PRESIDENT, AND RESTRAINT AND RESPECT ON BOTH SIDES, HAVE TO BE SEEN AS NET PLUS FOR BOTH. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER PRESIDENT CAN DELIVER ON HIS PROMISES, OR WHAT UCS AND CAMPESINOS ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT AS JUST AGRARIAN REFORM. MARCH DID DEMONSTRATE IN REMARKABLE FASHION THAT CAMPESINOS CAN AND WILL SCRAIFICE AND GO INTO STREET TO CALL ATTENTION TO THEIR NEEDS.

12. IN FOLLOWIN DAY RECAP MENTIONED ABOVE, UCS LEADERSHIP DESCRIBED WHAT IT TOOK TO GET PRESIDENT MOLINA TO APPEAR. WHILE GROUP WAS STILL MARCHING, MOLINA SAID HE WOULD SEND HIS PERSONAL SECRETARY TO RECEIVE THE PETITION ON HIS BEHALF. UCS LEADERS CLAIM THEY TOLD HIM THEY WOULD SIMPLY NOT DEAL WITH ANYONE BUT PRESIDENT HIMSELF. AS DIMENSIONS OF CROWD AND DETERMINATION OF UCS BECAME APPARENT, MOLINA RELENTED. POLOFFS ON SCENE AT CASA PRESIDENCIAL CONVINCED THAT MOLINA AND HIS ADVISORS

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WERE SURPRISED AND IMPRESSED WITH WHAT WAS UNFOLDING BEFORE THEM. "THIS TIME WE SHOWED OUR PEACEFUL AND COOPERATIVE INTENT", THE UCS SECGEN SAID, "NEXT YEAR WE CAN GET FIVE TIMES AS MANY OUT. WHETHER WE DO SO TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT, OR TO DRIVE HIM FROM OFFICE, DEPENDS ON HOW WELL HE CAN PRODUCE ON HIS PROMISES", WHILE THIS MIGHT BE OVERSTATEMENT, THE UCS MARCH MADE DRAMATIC POINT OF GROUP'S PRESENT STRENGTHS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, POLICIES, AGRICULTURAL WORKERS, LAND REFORMS, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 DEC 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: kelleyw0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SANSAA05001
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740372-0965
From: SAN SALVADOR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741214/aaaaalyu.tel
Line Count: 272
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 74 A-153, 74 NOV 6, 74 SAN SALVADOR 4977
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: kelleyw0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 APR 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <01 APR 2002 by kelleyw0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MASS MARCH BY CAMPESINOS TO PRESIDENTIAL PALACE
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ES, UCS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005